To the Honourable the

Knights, Citizens and Burgesses in PARLIAMENT Assembled.

The Humble Petition of *Oliver Flemming*, Knight.

Humbly Sheweth,

THat your Petitioner after 15. Years service to his late Majesty, of ever blessed memory in forraign Negotiations, having contracted therein a great debt, and being left abroad destitute of all supply for his subsistence, he was forced to return home at such a time as his Majesties own afflictions had made it unseasonable and unpossible for him to expect any other relief or recompence, then his Majesties acceptance and Royall compassion of both which your Petitioner had a large and ample Testimony.

That staying in Town by his Majesties command, he was by an Ordinance of Lords and Commons put upon the Office of Master of the Ceremonies, which he severall times performed to his Majesty (who well knew and considered your Petitioners sad condition) with his favor and approbation; yet after an innocent and faithful discharge for several years of his trust therein, he was again put upon that fatall usurpation and change of Government left in a State, much worse then when it was first put upon him, as by the humble Narrative annexed, more fully appears.

That for the third stroke of this Shipwrack of his fortune, he was thrown upon executing the same Office to persons whom he could not resist and by his own invincible necessities he was forced to act passively. In which his least Misery, was the utter ruine of himself and family, and his only consolation, his constant refusall to repair it, in that detestable way, out of the spoiles of his gracious Master, the ruines of the Church, or the desolation of private families, although often pressed and urged upon him.

Your Petitioner therefore far stricken in years, & out of all imployment, with the so near concernment of a Wife and children, yet unprovided for in extream poverty, humbly begs, that your Honours would commiserate his deplorable condition, and take into consideration his debts contracted in the publick service, and order such relief as his extream pressing calamities require, and as shall seem fit to the Justice, Charity and generosity of the Parliament.

And Your Petitioner shall pray. &c.

THE
Humble Narrative
OF
OLIVER FLEMMING KNIGHT;

Shewing the manner how I came to execute the Office of Maſter of the Ceremonies, with my Comportment and ſufferings therein, for the ſpace of near 18. Years.

I Had the honour to ſerve his late Majeſty (of bleſſed memory) in the quality of his Reſident, for the time of 15. years, to the Cantons of *Swizzerland*, *Grizons*, *Geneva*, ſeverall *German Princes*, and to ſome Imperiall Cities; but by reaſon of the then growing troubles at home, *I* found my ſelf totally abandoned, great Arrears due to me, no mony tranſmitted for my ſubſiſtance, nor could I expect any for the future, and no rable to ſuffer any longer my extream miſery, being incredibly afflicted, to ſee his Majeſties honour and the publick Reputation wounded through my ſides, I was forced to come home.

At my Arrivall, *I* acquainted his Majeſty with my ſad condition, who was graciouſly pleaſed to be very ſenſible of it, but not able at that time to help me. I alſo acquainted his Majeſty with ſome ſecret Negotiations which I had had; with the Directors of the late Duke *Bernard*, of *Weymors* Army, according to inſtructions I had to that purpoſe. Some Propoſitions were made unto me of great Importance, concerning *Briſack*, and the reſt of the ſaid Dukes Conqueſts in *Alſatia*, and other adjacent parts, which I then delivered his Majeſty in writing. It did much trouble his Majeſty that the poſture of his affairs then were ſuch, as that he was altogether unable to lay hold on thoſe overtures, ſo honourable and advantagious. I was commanded to return them thanks for their good will and affection

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to his Majesty, but they finding themselves destitute of their hopes, were forced to stick close to thir former agreement with *France*.

His Majesty was then at *Windsor*, when I waited on him; and at his departure thence was pleased to command me to stay at *London*, and to make what shift I could for my subsistance, promising and assuring me that when God should restore him to his authority again, he would take care for the payment of my Arrears, & some fitting encouragement for my long service. He was then also pleased to command me to be vigilant & industrious to keep life in that business of *Brisack* and *Alsatia*, hoping that in time he should be in a condition to imbrace it.

After his Majesties departure, the Ambassadours and Residents continued their Residence in *London*; where having observed from time to time the beginnings, and seen some sad events of our civill Warrs, they did successively make their addresses to the Parliament.

It was then thought necessary, to find out a person fitly qualified, to execute the place of *Master of the Ceremonies*. Some were pleased to name my self, and so I was commanded by an Ordinance of Parliament, to discharge that place.

This was done, not only without my seeking, (not having spoken to any friend either for this or any other place whatsoever) but to the contrary; (from a serious desire to be excused from that imployment, and in a private station, to attend the good issue of his Majesties Concernments) I did urge some friends of mine, that I might be dispensed with, which can be witnessed by persons of eminent quality yet alive. But the Ordinance being passed both the Houses, I did, (not without reluctance, accept of it, and this is the manner of my being engaged in that expensive, and to me ruinous imployment, which I have ever since executed with unwearied diligence, and so far as the calamities of the Times, so full of Distraction, Factions, Disorders and Confusions would permit; constantly managed the things which came within the Sphear of my activity, with all possible prudence and dexterity, to the profit and honour of the Nation.

This punctilious place I was constrained to execute alone, without any help, only when the *Lords* and *Commons* sate, I made use of some Gentlemen of quality, that out of affection to the publick reputation did voluntarily assist me, when there was occasion of any such publick service, during which time, and his Majesties restraint, I was

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commanded upon severall occasions, and to severall places, to conduct Ambassadours to his Majesties presence, who was pleased to approve of those services, and graciously to reiterate his former promises to mee.

Shortly after, it pleased God for the sins of these Nations, to permit wicked men to perpetrate an Act of the greatest attrocity; The King was put to death, with no lesse barbarous cruelty then unheard of insolent ostentation; such as no History can parallell since the Creation. This fatall blow given, and the Peers ignominiously laid aside, and left a Skelliton only of their innate dignity and honours, and the most zealous, faithfull, and prudent Patriots of the House of *Commons* forcibly secluded, and the whole Foundation of the antient Government subverted, a Democraticall Common-Wealth Declared for; but in effect it proved to be a Lawlesse and Tyrannicall Oligarchy, which was ingenuously confessed by some of the most Judicious amongst them, foretelling that all would come to confusion and ruine.

Forraign Princes and States send their Ambassadours to acknowledge & congratulate this new Government, with great Obsequiousnesse, conforming themselves with great difficultie and aversion, to the capriciousnes of those that did manage the affairs, who did unhinge all decency and order therein.

They did send their Emissaries abroad, with great expence and ostentation, accompanied with extravagant Instructions, which was matter of laughter to some of our neighbours. The great concourse of forraign Ministers, made some of them think it fit to have a committee to Regulate affairs of that nature, and how to manage the publick Negotiations with forraign Ministers; and what course and form to be established in the distribution of Nationall civilities toward strangers, according to their severall Characters and qualities; but no such Committee was appointed. Some were of opinion, that all Ceremonies were superfluous, that substantialls were to be minded, as if there were no substance in the Transactions betwixt Nation and Nation; That such triviall things might be taken into consideration, according to the emergent occasions. The duty that I owed to the honour of the Nation, begot in me an afflictive resentment of these disorders, yet from a plain hearted and sincere desire to be as Instrumentall as I could, to prevent further violations thereof, and from a necessity a-

gainſt which I had no defence, (my then condition conſidered) I was forced to act in this place, & (to the intent I might better accompliſh thoſe publick ends, which I then deſigned) having more work then I was able to wield, and no Gentlemen perſwaded to aſſiſt me as formerly, they being weary of that trouble and thankleſſe office, I did Remonſtrate the neceſſity of having ſome help, alledging the Example of the Kings Court, and of all other Courts and Governments, and did inſtance in Sir *Lewes Lukenor*, who had for his aſſiſtance Sir *William Button*, and Sir *John Finnet*, beſide a Marſhall of the Ceremonies, whoſe Office was to go before, and to make way at Audiences, and to be ſent by the Maſter, upon ordinary occaſions to the publick Miniſters. The aſſiſtants did officiate in caſe of ſickneſſe, or other neceſſary abſence of the Maſter but all my endeavors proved fruitleſſe. I was told by ſome of them that they needed no Pedagogue to inſtruct them. That their Government was of that power and authority, that they could eſtabliſh things of that nature, without being minded of former examples in *England*, or of what was practiſed in forraign parts. That I ought to reſt ſatisfied with what orders I ſhould receive from time to time, and for to help and aſſiſt me they would give order to their Meſſengers, to wait upon me to that purpoſe; I deſired that it might be ſeriouſly conſidered how much it would reflect upon the honour of the Nation, to imploy men of that condition, breeding, & odious imployment, no wiſe capable nor qualifi'd to act in a buſineſs of ſuch a punctiglious and delicate nature; That the publick Miniſters could not chooſe but be ſenſible of ſuch attempts and affronts put upon them; but all I could ſay was in vain, and as I did foreſee, the publick Miniſters did greatly ſtorm at this indignity, and did make their complaints, but no redreſſe was given, and they calmly at laſt did indure it with patience, contenting themſelves to laugh at our extravagant ways, and deſpotical actings, making themſelves merry with the gallantry of the Serjeants and Jaylors (as they called them) that were appointed to accompany them to their Audience. All which I was forced to hear and ſee, to my extream grief and vexation, and ſometimes taking occaſion to ſpeak of theſe things, hoping thereby to procure a remedy; I was anſwered, they were ſent, and not ſent for, and that they might return whence they came, if not pleaſed with the government of *England*.

When Ambaſſadours came, then on a ſuddain all things were huddled

hudled up with confusion and disorder, and acted according to the imperious humor of some few, who with great superciliousness did arrogate to themselves an infallible knowledge of all State Negotiations and affairs, which others taking for granted, did acquiesse in the judgment of those self-creating State-Grandees, who created also these Innovations in matter of Audience, that it must not be demanded of the Master of the Ceremony, according to the general practise of all Nations, but must be demanded by Letter to the Speaker, when granted, then the Master of the Ceremonies did bring them to the House where being sate, they delivered their Credentials to the said Master, and he to the Speaker. In private Audience with the Counsel of State it must likewise be procured by Letters from the publick Minister to the President, and then an Order to the Master of the Ceremony to bring him. None were permitted to have Audience in the House, but extraordinary and ordinary Ambassadors, other publick Ministers of lesser Characters, must not be admitted into the House; but a Committee was chosen and sent up to the House of Peers, and the Chair-man received his Credentials from the hand of the Master of the Ceremonies. The House of Lords was not constantly made use of, but sometimes the Inner Court of Wards was appointed, which sometimes did beget Disputes, because they who had not their Audience in the House of Peers, conceived it a disparagement to their Masters, but that which did most justly offend those publick Ministers of the lesser Classis, and in them their Masters, was; That contrary to the practise of the whole World in all the sorts of Government, they were not permitted to deliver their Credentials themselves, to that which was looked upon as the Supream Authority; but when they saw their Complaints and Quarrellings did produce no satisfaction, they were ordered by their Masters to connive at such punctiglios, to the end it might not be an impediment to more material businesses. The publick Ministers in their Reciprocal Visits, would comfort one another, that they must do in *England*, as those that did reside in *Turkey*, *Moscovia*, and other Barbarous Princes Courts, and as to their State Negotiations, that they had as little satisfaction, for they did meet with so many difficulties, delays, unaccustomed and uncivill ways of Treating, that they could not tell how to behave themselvs, their Commissioners being often changed, and so constrained to travell

vell into buſineſs, that had been upon the matter already agreed upon.

The truth is, that the Publick Miniſters were generally ill uſed, unequally and uncivilly dealt withall, the Laws of Nations violated, affronted in their perſons, arreſted in their Coaches, violent hands laid upon them by Bayliffs.

An Extraordinary Ambaſſador from *Venice*, being upon his way hither, had ſent ſome of his goods by Sea, the Ship being of *Holland*, was taken and brought into *England*, and the goods ſeized upon by the prize Office; the Secretary of that State claims the Ambaſſadors goods, but no reſtitution endeavoured. A while after the Ambaſſadour comes himſelf, and at an Audience prays, that his goods might be reſtored unto him again, offering to diſcover ſome perſons that had ſome part of his things, eſpecially ſome fair Looking-glaſſes; and had nothing but fair promiſes, and went away without ſatisfaction.

This is but a touch, incidental to this Diſcourſe, it would require a Volume to enumerate the Injuries that have been put upon Publick-Miniſters. When great faults were committed, and of ſo groſſe a nature, that even thoſe who had uſurped the Authority, were aſhamed of them, then was I made choice of, to excuſe and apologize for them, and deſired to take the fault upon my ſelf; Some of the Ambaſſadors would ſmile, and ſay there was a little Civility in the excuſe, but that they knew well enough from whom thoſe Affronts came. Theſe things were ſwallowed and diſſembled, to the admiration of all thoſe who had any knowledge in Foreign affairs.

No preſents were to be given to Publick Miniſters, contrary to the cuſtom of all Nations and Governments; no, not the Warrants for Bucks and Does in their Seaſons, as was conſtantly uſed to be in the Regal Government; and to the end that this might not ſeem to be a ſordid frugality, it was tempered with an Act of generoſity (ſo called by them) towards Publick Miniſters, which was to forbid me to accept of the Donations due to my place, and an odious command laid upon me, not to permit any others imployed in the Service of Publick Miniſters, to receive any gratuity from them; but ſome ſaid that this was a great wrong and injury to me, and that I and others ought to be reimburſed out of the publick purſe, which was promiſed, but not performed in the leaſt. With no ſmall difficulty and

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shameful solicitation, the publick Writers had their wonted proportion of Wines allowed them, Customs and Excise free, but towards the latter end, the Residents were abated a fourth part of their accustomed proportion, all which I was constrained to bear upon my heart as matter of much indignity and sorrow, having no other comfort left me, but the constancy and integrity of my endeavours, to prevent the prostituting of the Nations Honour by such mercenary gee.

I humbly conceive, that this rational question may be asked me, why I did Act all this time, and that in all Changes whatsoever, whether my reason could dispence and approve of these frequent revolutions? To which I answer in the Negative, for as I was unwilling at first to meddle with this Office, which hath been my undoing, so did I from time to time expresse my dislike of proceedings, when and where I could do it with prudence and safety, in a time when the power of the Nation, was wielded with so much passion and violence.

But my invincible answer is, that Lawless necessity is an irresistable Tyrant, which forced me to act passively, or to perish; for as I humbly shewed in the beginning of this Narrative, I was deeply engaged for his late Majesty (of ever blessed memory) which debts are since doubled, the Creditors reckoning Interest upon Interest for Twenty Years together, this made my burden so heavy and sad, nay almost unsupportable, that men did admire how I was able to bear it.

And I seriously considered with my self, that my serving in that place was very innocent, as consisting in holding forth to Strangers the Clemency of the Nation, and indeed, during the whole course of my service in this Office, my end was fixed upon the service, interest and honour of the Nation, constantly hoping, that God, in his providence would in his good time deliver us out of our distractions, and resettle the three Nations again, upon the ancient Basis, of our former

Government, which we see now effected, in great mercy, by the happy return of his Sacred Majesty to his Throne. That this is not a flattering insinuation, but a sincere and reall truth is sufficiently known to such, as I durst open my thoughts unto. Besides the duty of my Loyalty, and my confidence of the publiques re-establishment, and therein my own particular concernments were a strong motive thereunto; for I found, that I could not expect any Justice, much less favour from men that did look upon me, as an old Courtier, and so not much to be trusted, and to this I may adde, the hatred that some leading men did bear me secretly, for having with freedome of discourse expressed my aversion, against Enthusiasts, and their new Heterodox principles in matters of Religion.

I acted all along by the aboveſaid Ordinance of Lords and Commons, who had Declared for a King and Parliament, during which time, I had the honour to be commanded to conduct Ambassadours to his late Majesties presence, who was graciously pleased to accept of my service, as is above mentioned, and I have in all changes, constantly shunned all other Patents, Commissions and powers of whomsoever, which was not without great difficultie and increase of jealousie and distrust, which besides the operation it had, in obstructing the just payment of what was due to my place, did even hinder the reimbursing of what I was out of purse for their publick service; Nay, their suspition went so far, that some that had the management of State-affairs, did secretly request the publick Ministers, not to acquaint me with their Negotiations, but they frequently comming to visit mee did impart to mee, what had been said to my prejudice, blaming greatly their ingratitude, jealousie and ignorance, professing, the greatest comfort they had here, was my conversation.

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This can be witnessed by many Ambassadours and others yet alive. The necessity of speaking of these things, I hope will Apologize for this seeming ostentation. I did easily perceive that their drift in revealing these things concerning my self was to have wrought a discontent, and resentment in me, and to have made some use of me to the publick prejudice, which our new States-men, (not having past their novitiate) did not dive into, and the truth is, that upon this score of revenge and my known poverty, some of them thought, they had gotten such intimacy with me, that they might attempt to feel how the pulse of my fidelity did beat; not doubting, but their injuries added to my extream necessity, and ill usage would make mee malleable enough for their ends, and to become an Instrument for the furthering of their Masters designs; to this purpose considerable summs of mony were offered, but were by me refused with a generous Resentment, justly abhorring any thing of that nature, that might any way tend to the dishonour or disadvantage of the Nation, or to my particular infamy; I am ready when required, to name the parties. It may easily be conceived, that during the space of so many years, and the constant concourse of so many publick Ministers, and important Negotiations, if I had sought my self, I had opportunities many and great, to have made my fortune, especially, considering that I (almost alone) was permitted to converse with them dayly.

When his Majesty (of blessed memory) his goods and moveables were sold, then was I earnestly advised and pressed to lay hold on that opportunity, for the payment of what was due to me, and fitting recompence for my services the same was offered me, when the Kings, Queens, and Church-Lands were to be sold, to pay those to whom they were indebted, but I did loyally, constantly and conscientiously decline and shun those ways of payment and compensation, neither would I meddle with any confiscated particular mans estate, rather choosing extream poverty, then to bee

obnoxious to the Curse of the true Owners; and this I did, in Times, when there was little or no probability, to be called to an Accompt by man: I was also told, that I should be imployed on some considerable Ambassie, but in a prudent way, did shun all occasions that might ingage me in any such odious Imployment, although the Allowance was incomparably beyond all former precedents, and better paid, being permitted to draw Bills of Exchange upon their Masters, a thing never heard of heretofore.

Many other great promises were made to me, by the successive powers, but none performed in the least; nor could I ever obtain so much Justice, as to have some appointed to sign my Bills, according to Custom, for the money I had continually occasion to disburse for the publick Service. By the Ordinance of Parliament, I was to enjoy the Office, with all the Allowances, Perquisits, Rights, and Priviledges, as hath at any time, or doth belong to any Master of the Ceremonies; which I found did formerly arise by 200 l. Annuall Fees, an allowance of twenty shillings a day for every Audience, twenty shillings a day for a Coach out of Town, if in Town ten shillings; and besides other incidents, one of the greatest benefits, the right of receiving the accustomed Donations, and Presents from Ambassadors, and other Publike Ministers: But I have not received any of these Perquisites and Rights, belonging to the place, according to the Ordinance; only I received a great part of the two hundred pound Sallary *per annum*, with great pains, solicitation, and extraordinary expence. What I received on that Accompt, will appear on the Publike Receipts; I am out of purse, above a thousand pound for Coach Hire, and a thousand pound for Audiences, and Conferences; and besides the several Journeys to his Majesty, for five and twenty Journeys to *Gravesend*, and elsewhere, to fetch in, and to re-conduct Ambassadours back again; each Journey, computed one with ano-

number, did coſt me ten pound at the leaſt, conſidering the Expenſiveneſs, and diſtance of the places, and the number of ſuch, as were ordered from time to time, to attend that Service. The Donations and Preſents due to the place, from Ambaſſadours and other Publike Miniſters, were courteouſly ſent by them to me, and by me Civilly ſent back again. What thoſe Preſents did amount unto in ſo long a time, I cannot exactly ſet down, but according to my beſt, and moſt conſcientious eſtimate, I conceive, that it might amount unto ſomething above five thouſand pound.

I finde my ſelf, after near five and thirty years Publique Service abroad and at home, in this ſad and unparalleld Condition, that I am eight thouſand pound worſe then nothing, although far beneath what is juſtly owing me from the Publique; I have been forced to pawn and ſell, what I had of worth, even to my wearing Cloaths. What I have ſet down in this Narrative (as to the ſubſtance of it) I affirm to be a poſitive Truth, and ready to make Oath upon it, if required. Therefore I do humbly pray, that ſome preſent relief may be afforded me (to prevent my otherwiſe inevitable Ruine) and that a courſe may be taken for diſcharging of a Debt contracted in his late Majeſties

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Service Abroad and at Home, in obedience to Publique Commands, upon an indeclinable neceſſity.

I do in all humble manner crave pardon for this Prolix Diſcourſe; but I hope the extremity of my Condition will Apologize for me, and Plead my Excuſe.

FINIS.

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